

After the Birth: Caring for Yourself and Your Baby



Having a baby is a lot of hard work! And it takes time to recover. To have enough energy for your new baby and yourself, eat well, exercise, and rest as much as you can.

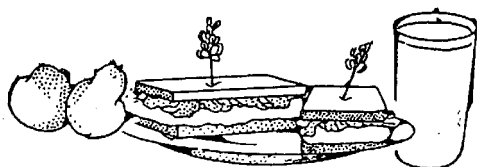
Eat Well

Continue eating the same good foods that you ate when you were pregnant. If you are breastfeeding, you should eat a little more food than you did when pregnant. If you are formula feeding you can eat a little less. Here are some guidelines:

Choose many different types of foods each day.

Try to eat at least:

- ✓ 6 servings of breads, cereals, and grains
- ✓ 2 to 3 servings of meat, poultry, fish, dried beans and peas, and /or eggs
- ✓ 5 servings of fruits and vegetables
- ✓ 2 servings of milk and milk products (4 if breastfeeding or less than 19 years old)



Take your vitamin and mineral supplement until your 6 week checkup. At that time, your health care provider will tell you whether to continue taking it.

To help you return to your prepregnant weight, choose foods that are low in fat and sugar. For example, drink skim or reduced fat rather than whole milk. It will take several months to lose all

the weight you gained. Talk with your health care provider if you need help with your diet.

As one new mother said about her food habits, "My family learns from what I do. Because I eat good food now, they want to. Now we're all doing better."

Exercise

Gentle exercises can firm your muscles, burn calories, and help you feel relaxed. Ask your health care provider to recommend some exercises. If you had a cesarean section, be especially careful to follow his or her advice.

Walking, swimming, and bike riding increase your heart rate and improve your overall fitness. Gentle stretching, sit-ups, or waist bends help firm muscles that were stretched during pregnancy.

Decide what exercises will fit into your schedule. You might try walking every day with your baby in a carrier or stroller. The fresh air and activity will help both of you feel good!



Rest Whenever You Can

Your new baby will need a lot of attention. Try to rest when the baby sleeps. Put your feet up when you feed your baby. Ask your family and friends to help by cooking a meal, cleaning the house, or taking care of the baby while you relax.

Take some time for yourself! Even breastfeeding moms need time alone. You can express breastmilk or leave formula for times you are away.

As one new mother said, "I think a mother needs to get out even if it's just for a 15-minute walk. It was hard to leave my baby at first. I was so attached. But we both needed the break."

Take Extra Care

If you are breastfeeding, you need to be extra careful about using any substances that can get in your milk and harm your baby. But even if you are formula feeding, your use of alcohol, cigarettes, medicines, and drugs may be bad for your baby.

- ✓ If you or anyone in your home smokes cigarettes, your baby may have more colds. Ask others who smoke to do so away from the baby.
- ✓ If you drink alcohol every day it may be harder for you to care for your baby. Alcohol decreases your appetite so that you don't eat the good foods you need.
- ✓ Some medicines and drugs affect your moods and the way you act. They may make it more difficult to care for your baby.
- ✓ Having an occasional drink or taking an aspirin for a headache is probably okay. But talk to your health care provider first about safe limits, especially if you breastfeed.

After Baby Blues

Like many new mothers, you may feel "up" one minutes and "down" the next. You may cry or feel

sad sometimes for almost no reason. This is called the "after baby blues" or "postpartum depression." It is very common.

It happens partly because of the normal changes that your body goes through. Also, with a new baby you may not be getting enough sleep. This can make you cranky.

If you feel sad and depressed, do something nice for yourself. During the baby's naps, read a book or magazine. Listen to music, call a friend, or take a nap yourself.

You will feel blue less often as your body adjusts. But if you stay really depressed, you may have a more serious problem. Ask for help from your health care provider.

A New Beginning

Being a parent is not easy. Luckily, you've had nine months to get ready! Now that you've had your baby, it is important that you continue to take good care of yourself. When you eat right, get enough rest, exercise daily, and avoid harmful substances, you will help your body to be at its best.

